

# St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 115131           |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Essex            |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 379013           |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 4–5 October 2011 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Selwyn Ward      |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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|--|---|
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Primary                                 |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Voluntary aided                         |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 4–11                                    |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed                                   |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 340                                     |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | The governing body                      |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | Father Peter Walker                     |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Jeff Graham                             |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | 6 July 2009                             |
| <b>School address</b>                      | Guildford Road<br>Colchester<br>CO1 2RA |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                    | 01206 865747                            |
| <b>Fax number</b>                          | 01206 791589                            |
| <b>Email address</b>                       | admin@st-james-colchester.essex.sch.uk  |

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|---------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Age group</b>          | 4–11             |
| <b>Inspection date(s)</b> | 4–5 October 2011 |
| <b>Inspection number</b>  | 379013           |

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors, who visited 31 lessons taught by 14 teachers. These lessons included sessions teaching letters and the sounds they make (phonics), some of which were led by learning support staff. Inspectors spoke with staff, parents and carers, members of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work, the analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, attendance records, school policies and procedures, school leaders' monitoring records, school planning and risk assessments. They also analysed the questionnaires received from 112 pupils, 38 staff, and 83 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Is there any variation in the progress of boys and girls of different abilities and backgrounds?
- What is the impact of pupils joining the school partway through Key Stage 2, and how well are these pupils supported?
- Are there aspects of provision for pupils' welfare that stand out at this school?

## Information about the school

This is an above average-sized primary school. The majority of pupils are White British, with others coming from many different minority ethnic heritages. The largest minority is of Eastern European origin. An above-average proportion of pupils are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average, as is the percentage with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Mobility is high, with an above-average proportion of pupils joining the school partway through their primary education. St James' has an Activemark award and Healthy Schools status. A breakfast club is run before the start of school each morning. There is a playgroup on the school site but that is independently managed and did not form part of this inspection.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

St James' provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It is popular with parents and carers. Typical of the many positive comments from satisfied parents and carers, was the description of St James' as 'a happy school that has improved in recent years'. Among the recent improvements is the faster progress pupils are making in reading and writing. The introduction of a scheme to teach letters and sounds (phonics) from the Reception Year through to Key Stage 2 has been key to this. There have been initiatives aimed at similarly raising attainment in mathematics, including through the use of handheld games consoles. These have had less impact because the arrangements for teaching mathematics are less structured and systematic than those in English.

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Closer liaison with the neighbouring playgroup has helped to raise the skills and capabilities with which children join the Reception Year. These are now in line with expectations for children's ages; previously they were lower. Attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is average, with children making good progress over the course of the Reception Year. Progress through the rest of the school has been uneven, with sometimes better progress evident in Key Stage 1 than Key Stage 2. It, nevertheless, represents satisfactory achievement for boys and girls of all abilities. The many pupils who join the school partway through Key Stage 2 include a number at an early stage of learning English. These pupils are among those who particularly benefit from the school's exceptional welfare arrangements, and they are helped to quickly settle in. As a result, the progress of pupils who join the school other than at the usual time is similar to that of pupils who are at St James' all through their primary years.

Teaching and learning are no more than satisfactory because inconsistencies remain, including over the pace of lessons and the match of work to pupils' often widely different capabilities. Pupils are routinely encouraged to talk answers through with a partner, but the opportunity to develop pupils' listening skills is missed when teachers simply ask pupils to repeat what they told their partner instead of pressing them to report what their partner told them. This is significant because it is pupils' sometimes weak listening that slows their learning and which detracts from their otherwise good behaviour in lessons and around the school.

Leaders can point to some key successes, including the strength of the partnership they have built with parents and carers. Thanks to the school's rigorous systems,

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attendance has improved. It is now average when, previously, it was a little below. The curriculum has been made more stimulating, with activities that motivate pupils to work with concentration and effort. Leaders regularly monitor lessons, but this monitoring has given an overly positive picture of some lessons' effectiveness because it has focused on looking at the features of teaching rather than on how much pupils are learning and making progress. Although this is a school where recent improvements are evident, the school's capacity for improvement is satisfactory rather than better because the school's self-evaluation has been overgenerous in assessing key aspects of provision and pupils' achievement.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- By the end of the summer term 2012, increase the effectiveness of teaching by ensuring that in all lessons:
  - the learning objectives and success criteria, set out at the start of lessons, are sharply focused and matched to pupils' different capabilities
  - teachers ensure a brisk pace of learning and activities that are appropriately timed and which enable pupils to build on what they have learnt before
  - more effective use is made of 'talk partners' to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills
  - pupils are given clear guidance through marking that shows them what they need to do to improve their work, and they are routinely given time to read, reflect on and respond to the comments teachers write.
- By the start of the autumn term 2012, accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics by developing a scheme that:
  - ensures that all pupils systematically develop their numeracy skills and capabilities throughout their time in Key Stages 1 and 2
  - gives pupils practical applications for their numeracy skills and problem solving, including through subjects other than mathematics.
- Develop more robust management systems by the end of the spring term 2012 through:
  - focusing lesson observations on pupils' learning and rates of progress rather than on the features of teaching
  - rigorously following up the points for development identified by school leaders when they visit lessons and scrutinise assessment and pupils' work
  - ensuring that the joint planning across all year groups is effective in sharing teachers' best practice.

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## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

Attainment at the end of Year 6 is average, but it is a little better in English than in mathematics. Boys generally attain at least as well as girls. Satisfactory progress is made by boys and girls across the ability range and including those from all ethnic heritages and those known to be eligible for free school meals. Progress is not better because work in lessons is not always tailored closely enough to the often wide range of ability in each class. In an otherwise well-paced mathematics lesson in Years 5 and 6, the progress of some more-able pupils slowed because they had already devised sensible strategies for identifying, mostly correctly, the prime numbers in a 100-square grid and shaded the grid in before the teacher had finished explaining the task to the class. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is satisfactory, but there is variation in the performance of individual pupils. There are some who do well but there are others, including a small number of those in last year's Year 6, whose progress was notably slower than that of their peers. Where the school has had most notable success is in accelerating progress of those who join with little or no English, in many cases partway through Key Stage 2.

As parents and carers confirm, any misbehaviour is rare, but pupils' learning sometimes slows because not all listen as carefully as they should. This can, on occasion, mean that pupils are unclear about what they should be doing when organised into pairs or small groups. Even when pupils listen intently to their teacher, they do not always listen properly to each other's contributions in lessons. Pupils are, nevertheless, well motivated and they enjoy school. This is due in no small part to the good relationships between adults and pupils, and to a curriculum that is made interesting and relevant. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe and of the need for a healthy lifestyle, with many taking part in the range of after-school clubs, which include lively activities such as table tennis. Pupils enjoy the many opportunities they have to take on responsibilities, including as school councillors and 'bike marshals' supervising the programme aimed at increasing the number of pupils who cycle to school. They take an interest in the local environment. They have, for example, petitioned the local authority about their road safety concerns.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>                             | <b>3</b> |
| Taking into account:   |          |
| Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>  | 3        |
| The quality of pupils' learning and their progress   | 3        |
| The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress | 3        |
| <b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>  | <b>2</b> |

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Pupils' behaviour</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b> | <b>3</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>   | 3        |
| <b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>  | <b>2</b> |

## How effective is the provision?

The features that particularly stand out at this school are the excellent arrangements for supporting pupils and ensuring their welfare. Drawing well on its partnerships with outside agencies, the school has gone the extra mile to ensure the inclusion of pupils with disabilities and those whose family circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. Arrangements for monitoring the progress of pupils with additional learning needs are extremely thorough, including daily tracking of progress by class teachers. The support provided in response to this includes one-to-one tuition. Its impact can be seen in, for example, the way pupils learning English as an additional language and others who join the school during the course of Key Stage 2 do at least as well as their peers, in some cases making exceptional progress. The school's work in promoting attendance has been especially significant for pupils with a history of persistent absence. There are examples of these pupils' attendance having been transformed as a result.

The good relationships that teachers have with their classes contribute to pupils' good motivation in lessons. Teachers work in close partnership with learning support staff, some of whom lead sessions Throughout the school, lessons start with a 'Can I...?' question that is aimed at identifying what the pupils are expected to learn. These are not always sharply focused enough. For example, the objective in a geography lesson, 'Can I find out about a country?' missed the opportunity to highlight specific geographical skills. Where pupils are given success criteria, these are too often the same for all, despite the wide range of age, ability and prior attainment in the class. The activities that pupils are assigned are not always closely enough matched to their different capabilities. Where this occurs, the pace of learning slows. It also slows when too long is allowed for activities. Although the daily letters and the sounds (phonics) sessions are having a positive impact on pupils' learning, the hour session is too long for some younger pupils to maintain their concentration. This means their attention drifts and their progress slows towards the end of the session. Pupils' books are marked regularly, but not all marking gives pupils clear enough guidance on the next steps they need to take to move their learning on. Sometimes teachers pose helpful questions in their marking but there is not a routine expectation, in every class, that comments and questions will be responded to.

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The curriculum is enriched through a wide range of well-attended clubs and other activities. Subjects such as history and geography are taught through topics, such as 'The Romans'. These run through the whole of Key Stages 1 and 2, with the intention that pupils in each class will learn age-appropriate skills. Skills are not always well enough developed, however, when 'Can I...?' objectives are loosely framed. Opportunities are found to incorporate literacy within the topics and other subjects, but fewer opportunities are found to reinforce numeracy in a similar way. The breakfast club helps those who attend it to get the morning off to a good and healthy start. Though one lad told inspectors he most liked the breakfast club because 'I can eat as much toast as I want', adults are successful in encouraging pupils to take part in energetic activities.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>The quality of teaching</b>   | <b>3</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>The use of assessment to support learning  | 3        |
| <b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>   | <b>1</b> |

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and leadership team are keen to move the school forward but they have tended to benchmark school self-evaluation against years earlier in the decade when St James' was performing much less well, rather than always in relation to national expectations. They have not been rigorous enough in checking on the effectiveness of lessons. Of the 30 prompts on the observation forms leaders use to monitor lessons, only one directly relates to the progress pupils make. Although there is some joint planning between teachers across the paired Years 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 5 and 6, this has not eliminated inconsistencies of approach and has not always proven effective in sharing best practice. Leaders, and the governing body, have relied on anecdotal evidence in making the assumption that test scores must be skewed by the lower performance of those who join the school partway through Key Stage 2. In fact, analysis of the results in 2011 shows this was not the case. The governing body is supportive, but it has been too dependent on leaders and advisers for its view of the school's performance. For that reason, governance is satisfactory. Nevertheless, the governing body is successful in ensuring that arrangements for pupils' safeguarding go beyond current regulatory requirements, particularly in ensuring the safety awareness of pupils in potentially hazardous circumstances, for example when handling hot pans as part of their cooking lessons.

St James' promotes equal opportunities well. Any difference between the attainment and progress of boys and girls is smaller than seen in many other schools and there are fewer differences between pupils from different backgrounds and family circumstances than commonly seen. Pupils learning English as an additional language



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are helped to do especially well. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are helped generally to make similar progress to their peers, and so do better than pupils in similar circumstances nationally. The school functions as a harmonious community where pupils get on well together. There are particularly close ties with the Church. Community cohesion is satisfactory rather than better, however, because there are relatively few links with schools in other parts of the country or overseas aimed at raising pupils' horizons and giving them first-hand experience of ways of life elsewhere.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| Taking into account:<br>The leadership and management of teaching and learning   | 3        |
| <b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>   | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>  | <b>3</b> |

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children settle quickly because of the very good induction arrangements when they start school. They learn orderly routines and understand the school's safety rules. An exiting array of activities ensures children's interests are met. Children make good use of the interactive whiteboard, for example in matching numbers to domino spots. They choose activities confidently, both inside and in the outdoor area. Staff interact well with children, taking part in their role play to progress language skills, and there are plenty of opportunities for children to practise their early writing skills. Children work well together, excited to share their sightings at the 'watch tower' using their kitchen roll 'binoculars'. Accurate assessment and good teaching mean children make good progress. Letters and sounds (phonics) teaching is a particular strength, and so reading is developing at a good pace. Snack time is used well to promote social skills. Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good, and the ties built with the neighbouring playgroup have already had a marked impact in raising children's attainment on entry to the Reception Year. Although the classrooms provide a stimulating environment, the outside area, though used well, is not as vibrant. Opportunities for physical activities such as climbing and use of bikes are not freely

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available as they have to be specially set up for the children.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>                   | <b>2</b> |
| Taking into account:   |          |
| Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage                          | 2        |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage                       | 2        |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2        |

## Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are very positive about almost all aspects of the school. A small minority are unhappy about pupils' preparation for the next stage of their education. Inspectors judge that pupils' average attainment in key literacy and numeracy skills, and their average attendance, means they are satisfactorily prepared for the move to secondary school. Parents and carers like the way the school keeps them well informed, including through regular text messages.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St James’ Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 83 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 340 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements  | Strongly agree |    | Agree |    | Disagree |   | Strongly disagree |   |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
|   | Total          | %  | Total | %  | Total    | % | Total             | % |
| My child enjoys school  | 50             | 61 | 31    | 38 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe  | 61             | 74 | 19    | 23 | 1        | 1 | 1                 | 1 |
| The school informs me about my child’s progress   | 50             | 61 | 28    | 34 | 3        | 4 | 1                 | 1 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school   | 45             | 55 | 33    | 40 | 3        | 4 | 0                 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school   | 47             | 57 | 33    | 40 | 0        | 0 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child’s learning  | 39             | 48 | 38    | 46 | 5        | 6 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle   | 39             | 48 | 42    | 51 | 1        | 1 | 0                 | 0 |
| The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment) | 34             | 41 | 36    | 44 | 3        | 4 | 1                 | 1 |
| The school meets my child’s particular needs  | 42             | 51 | 35    | 43 | 1        | 1 | 1                 | 1 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour  | 45             | 55 | 33    | 40 | 2        | 2 | 1                 | 1 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns   | 38             | 46 | 40    | 49 | 1        | 1 | 1                 | 1 |
| The school is led and managed effectively   | 47             | 57 | 31    | 38 | 2        | 2 | 1                 | 1 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school   | 53             | 65 | 28    | 34 | 0        | 0 | 1                 | 1 |

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

| Grade   | Judgement    | Description  |
|---------|--------------|--|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding  | These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.  |
| Grade 2 | Good         | These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.  |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory | These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.  |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate   | These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. |

### Overall effectiveness of schools

| Type of school       | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) |      |              |            |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
|                      | Outstanding   | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools      | 43  | 47   | 10           | 0          |
| Primary schools      | 6   | 46   | 42           | 6          |
| Secondary schools    | 14  | 36   | 41           | 9          |
| Sixth forms          | 15  | 42   | 41           | 3          |
| Special schools      | 30  | 48   | 19           | 3          |
| Pupil referral units | 14  | 50   | 31           | 5          |
| All schools          | 10  | 44   | 39           | 6          |

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Achievement:               | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.   |
| Attainment:                | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.  |
| Capacity to improve:       | the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.  |
| Leadership and management: | the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.  |
| Learning:                  | how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.  |
| Overall effectiveness:     | <p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul> |
| Progress:                  | the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.   |

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**

6 October 2011

Dear Pupils



**Inspection of St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Colchester, CO1 2RA**

Thank you for welcoming us to your school on our recent visit. St James' is giving you a satisfactory education, helping you to reach average standards by the end of Year 6. Those of you who join the school partway through Key Stage 2 do just as well as those who are at the school from the start. Many of you who have only recently begun learning English have made exceptional progress. This is because St James' makes outstanding provision for the welfare and support of everyone at the school. Your daily phonics sessions have helped all of you to make faster progress in English over the last year or so. We have asked the school to bring forward arrangements to help to similarly boost your numeracy skills. At present, you make slower progress in mathematics than in English.

It was good to see that attendance has improved and that you all have a good understanding of how to keep safe and enjoy a healthy lifestyle. It is pleasing to see so many of you keen to join the sports and other clubs that were starting up again during the week of the inspection, and many of you told us how much you enjoy the interesting things you get to learn at school. You get on well together and we saw good behaviour around the school. Though no-one misbehaved, we judged your learning behaviour as satisfactory rather than good because you do not all listen carefully enough in lessons. That is something that sometimes slows learning. We have suggested some things for your teachers to try to help with this and to speed your progress in other ways. You can help by always trying hard to listen to your teachers and to each other in lessons. You can also help by always taking care to read, think about and respond to the comments teachers make when they mark your work.

We have asked staff to particularly look at the progress you are each making when they visit each other's lessons. That will give them a clearer picture of how well you are all doing so that they know how they can continue to help you to do better.

Thank you for being so helpful on our visit, and our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward  
Lead inspector

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